

# 11 | *Extreme Voices: A Dark Side of Civic Engagement*

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THE ONGOING DISCUSSION of civic engagement includes something for everyone. At the programmatic level, conservatives applaud a means of addressing societal problems that does not involve the coercive power of government, while liberals appreciate voluntaristic approaches as the principal ones available at a time when popular support for activist government is at a low ebb. At the philosophical level, communitarians are gratified by any increased recognition of the need for people to meet their civic obligations, while their liberal adversaries can acknowledge civic engagement as a means of generating the social capital that furthers the welfare of individuals. Finally, those of us who work on the intermediate social scientific level are intrigued by hypotheses relating temporal changes in social relations to the welfare of societies. Moreover, there is room in the discussion for more of us than usual: the relevance of history, sociology, and to a lesser degree political science is clear, but even economists—like liberal political philosophers—can recognize an argument for enlightened self-interest buried beneath the unfamiliar terminology.

To be sure, some look skeptically on the current preoccupation with civic engagement and social capital. Where are the dependent variables,

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they ask? Has anyone demonstrated that variations in civic engagement are related to welfare measures of any interest? Thus far, plausible argument substitutes for hard evidence. Others are dubious about the purported decline of civic engagement in America, believing that even the independent variable has not been accurately characterized.<sup>1</sup> The chapters in this collection explore some of these issues.

This chapter too reflects a skeptical stance, but of a somewhat different sort. While many have questioned whether purported declines in civic engagement have had identifiable adverse consequences, only a few curmudgeons have suggested that civic engagement may not necessarily be a good thing.<sup>2</sup> That is what I argue here. Put simply, at least in the political realm I am doubtful that the relationship between civic engagement and social welfare is generally positive. For present purposes we can stipulate that high levels of civic engagement are optimal,<sup>3</sup> but I think that intermediate levels of civic engagement may well lead to outcomes that are inferior not just to outcomes produced by higher levels of civic engagement but also to those produced by lower levels.<sup>4</sup>

I begin by presenting a brief case study to illustrate the argument. Then I discuss an ironic development—that Americans have grown increasingly unhappy with government at the same time that government has grown ever more open to their influence. I believe that these trends are causally related, because people who take advantage of increased opportunities to participate in politics often are unrepresentative of the general population. Then I consider some of the normative arguments about civic engagement in light of the unrepresentativeness of those so engaged. In particular, how might society dilute the extreme voices that dominate political participation? Finally, an appendix explores the more social scientific question of why participators are unrepresentative.

1. For the views of one skeptic see Ladd (1996).

2. Do those whose engagement takes the form of joining the Ku Klux Klan or a militia make a net positive contribution to social capital? Clearly, one group can deploy its social capital to the detriment of other groups or of society as a whole.

3. But only for present purposes. There are reasons for doubting this claim as well. The classic example in the literature is the high voter turnout in Austria and Germany at the time their democracies were crumbling; Tingsten (1937, pp. 225–26). These high levels of political engagement apparently represented anger, desperation, and other motivations that normally are not viewed as things societies should seek to maximize.

4. Verba and Nie (1972, chap. 18) offer an earlier version of this argument. Their discussion seems to have been forgotten during the intervening years.

## My Home Town

Just outside historic Concord Center lies a four-square-mile area known as the Estabrook Woods.<sup>5</sup> Harvard University is the dominant landholder, with approximately 670 acres administered by its Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ). The Middlesex School, an elite private high school with approximately 300 acres, is the second largest landholder.<sup>6</sup> Harvard has a reputation for doing whatever is best for Harvard with its properties, so the town was pleasantly surprised in 1994 when the university offered to preserve its land in perpetuity, providing that 400 adjacent acres could be similarly protected in order to guarantee the continued integrity of the MCZ land as an ecological research area. Led by the Concord Land Conservation Trust (CLCT) a campaign to meet Harvard's challenge began. The Middlesex School promised to donate fifty acres on completion of its long-range development plan.

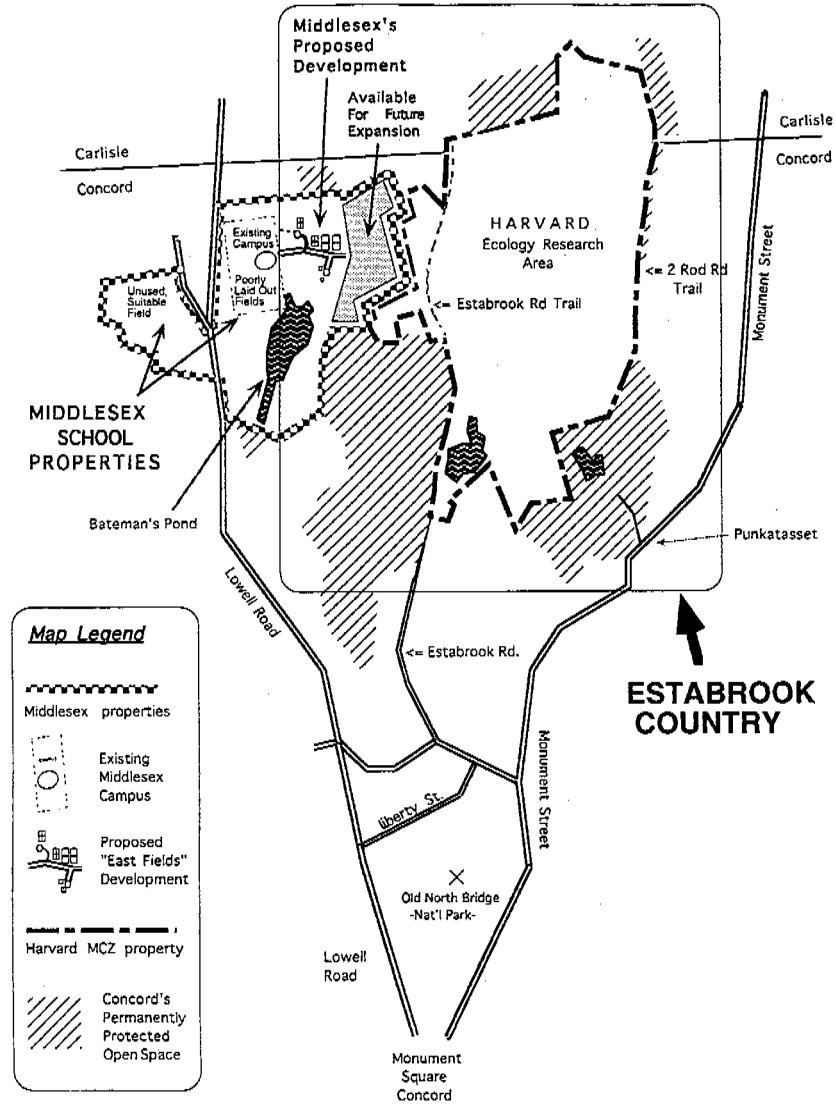
Middlesex had formally begun its expansion planning in 1990. A shift to coeducational status in the 1970s had strained the capacity of its athletic fields. In addition, given escalating housing costs in the surrounding area, the school wished to add to its existing stock of faculty housing. Over the course of the next few years the school voluntarily held two public meetings in cooperation with the town's Natural Resources Commission, four meetings in cooperation with the town's Planning Board, and four ad hoc meetings with interested members of the community. During this period the opposition began to form. The CLCT receded from view, taking no formal part in what followed. The opposition was led by a relatively new group, the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance, which had supported a major recent campaign by Don Henley to preserve the Walden Woods.<sup>7</sup> Substantively, the opposition reflected preservationist concerns—Thoreau and Emerson had written about the woods—as well as the obvious environmentalist sentiments.

5. The following case is based on my reading of the files held in the offices of the Concord Natural Resources Commission, the reports of the controversy contained in various issues of the *Concord Journal*, and conversations with representatives of the town, the school, and involved citizens. Because Concord is a small town and the controversy was recent and painful for many of those involved (several interviewees made references to unpleasant encounters in grocery stores), I do not cite those interviewed by name.

6. The 1992 movie *School Ties* was filmed on the Middlesex grounds.

7. Don Henley is the lead singer for the Eagles, a California rock group (known, e.g., for the song "Hotel California"). He nationalized the campaign to preserve land around Walden Pond.

Figure 11-1. *Map of Estabrook Country, Middlesex School Properties*



Source: Amended Middlesex proposal as of September 1997. Distributed by the Thoreau Country Conservation Alliance.

Middlesex submitted a plan in June 1993, providing for two soccer/lacrosse fields, eight tennis courts, six faculty housing units, and thirty-three parking spaces to occupy about twelve acres of its land (see Figure 11-1). Several points should be noted before continuing. First, Middlesex is a progressive institution responsible for a significant part of the ethnic diversity that might be said to exist in Concord. Moreover, the school has been a longtime protector of the Estabrook Woods; over the years it had purchased adjoining land to prevent development, and in the 1960s the school's trustees were among the leaders in the drive to acquire the large tract that was donated to Harvard.

Second, Middlesex was not proposing a toxic waste dump. Most of the area to be developed would consist of athletic fields. The school promised to use environmentally friendly grass treatments to minimize impact on the bordering woodlands. And although the new area would require a wetland crossing to reach, the school worked with town officials to minimize this impact.

Third, the area in dispute was not an old-growth redwood forest. There are stands of old-growth trees within the MCZ tract, but the disputed land lies to the settled side of the old Estabrook road, a path still used by mountain bikers and horse riders and easily passable by four-wheel drive vehicle. Plows and cows had been over much of this peripheral part of the "woods" many times in Concord's past.

For fifteen years I lived with my family about half a mile from Middlesex—close enough to hear the spectators cheering at the athletic contests. To us and our neighbors the school's proposal seemed reasonable in itself, and part of an all-around good deal for the town. The more important question, of course, is how the rest of the town felt, and on that score I have little doubt that we were more conservation-minded than average. Between deer eating the rhododendrons and coyotes eating the cats, there is a general feeling that nature is doing quite well in Concord. The fall air carries the sound of chain saws, and the spring breezes carry the smoke from open burning of brush. A sizable minority of the town feel that Thoreau was something of a ne'er-do-well. And it was a Californian, after all, who led the campaign to save Walden Woods (an earlier generation of Concordians sited the town dump a quarter-mile from the shore of the pond). In separate interviews with two town officials who were involved in the controversy, I conjectured that the Middlesex plan would have passed two or three to one in a town-wide vote; neither disagreed. This community sentiment was not apparent in the ensuing politics,

however. On the contrary, the subsequent proceedings were dominated by a small group of citizens implacably opposed to the Middlesex plan.

The town's Planning Board is generally responsible for evaluating the engineering and safety aspects of proposed developments. In practice the board also advises on some of the environmental questions projects are likely to encounter at later stages. Over the course of fifteen months the board worked with Middlesex to scale down the plan and change the design of the wetland crossing to mitigate its impact. In October 1994, sixteen months after the school's application, the board approved a revised six-acre plan.

The application then went to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), a five-member board created in the 1960s charged with administering the Massachusetts wetlands laws. Like other town boards, the NRC consisted of volunteers and those co-opted by town officials and sitting members of this and other boards. At the time, the NRC was composed of a retired environmental lawyer, a wildlife biologist, the conservation administrator of another town, a self-described environmental activist, and the director of the MCZ land, who recused himself from the proceedings because MCZ land abutted the property in question.

A year of intense controversy followed the Middlesex submission to the NRC. At eight public meetings activists and commission members repeatedly raised objections to the school's plan. By every indication the activists were sincere in their opposition, contributing impressive quantities of their own time and money. To some extent they saw the Estabrook Woods as an organic entity; the question was not the marginal one of "how much additional impact," but the much starker one of "preservation versus destruction." Moreover, the heavier-than-necessary infrastructure proposed in the initial plan gave rise to suspicions that Middlesex harbored additional future expansion plans. Although I am confident that the existing plan was not controversial outside the narrow circles of the activists, a more ambitious proposal to increase the size of the school and expand the campus deep into the woods would likely have been another story. To the outside observer the natural compromise appeared to be approval of Middlesex's current plan on condition that land located deeper in the woods be permanently protected, but this suggestion was rejected by Middlesex in 1993 and did not surface again until very late in the process after the contending parties had gridlocked.

Over the course of the year Middlesex representatives argued with the NRC and the activists about nesting goshawks, dragonflies and beetles,

and indian corn hills. The NRC files contain attendance sheets for five of these meetings, with a median attendance of fifty-five, although the local newspaper reported that one meeting was attended by more than 100 people. There are approximately 10,800 registered voters in Concord, so ½ to 1 percent of the citizenry took an active role in these proceedings.

A year after taking up the Middlesex proposal the NRC denied the permit. To no one's surprise, Middlesex announced that it would appeal the decision to the state Department of Environmental Protection. More surprising was the school's announcement that it would withdraw its not-yet-final donation of fifty-six acres to the campaign. Opponents were surprised and disappointed; the school's donation had been assumed to be a fait accompli.

Matters soon got worse. The town's counsel recommended to the Board of Selectmen that the town not contest the appeal. The NRC decision was based on three grounds, none of which was defensible on appeal. The first was the NRC's claim—denied by Middlesex—that the project would affect more than 5,000 square feet of wetlands. This is considered a “does so—does not” kind of argument that the school would eventually win by making further modifications to its wetlands crossing. The second was the threat to critical habitat, but a few days after its decision the NRC received official notification from the state's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program that the project raised no serious questions. There is some disagreement about whether this decision came as a complete surprise.

The third basis on which the NRC denied the appeal was less tangible: in its capacity as custodian of the town's natural heritage and resources the commission did not think that the project should go forward. But the law does not empower local conservation boards with this kind of wide-ranging discretionary authority, so absent any merit in the first two claims, the commission's decision was what in an earlier era might have been termed “arbitrary.”

Thus, after five years of activity, two years of intense politics, and thousands of dollars of expenditures, the land conservation drive had regressed. It was not just back to square one, but even further back: the Middlesex project would go forward, and the drive was fifty-six acres poorer than it once had been.

At this point cooler heads finally intervened. The Selectmen—elected town officials—who had taken no visible role in the proceedings, proposed that the parties go to mediation. Middlesex and the town agreed to split

the cost of three sessions, but when no agreement was reached, the school agreed to pay for additional sessions. The mediation included the League of Women Voters and representatives of the activists, along with Middlesex and the NRC. Ultimately, after eight sessions, agreement was at hand. In a last-ditch effort some of the activists filed desperate lawsuits, but the courts declined to intervene.<sup>8</sup> In April of 1997 the NRC unanimously approved the agreement, but not before being condemned by one of their erstwhile supporters: “[Your] integrity has been compromised . . . you will go down in history as destroyers of the earth.”<sup>9</sup>

In May of 1997—seven years after Middlesex began the planning process, and four years after its first official submission—the town signed the agreement, which goes into effect if the school’s appeal is denied (which at the time of this writing has still not been decided). Middlesex sources report that they had budgeted \$75,000 for the permitting process, but have spent \$400,000 on consultants, lawyers, and mediation. Being mostly in-house, the town’s expenditures are difficult to estimate, although it has spent about \$10,000 on outside legal fees. The pending final settlement amounts to a slightly scaled-down version of what emerged from the Planning Board stage in 1994. The school agrees to place 100 acres of peripheral land under a permanent conservation restriction and accepts a twenty-year restriction on a tract of land deeper in the woods.

To some, the preceding case illustrates grass-roots democracy: concerned citizens actively participated in the affairs of their community and materially affected the outcome. To others, the preceding case illustrates the opposite of grass-roots democracy: a few “true believers” were able to hijack the democratic process and impose unreasonable costs—fiscal and psychological—on other actors as well as the larger community. In the eloquent words of one citizen who monitored the proceedings: “As a taxpayer, these extensive debates only dishearten those of us who place their trust and confidence in the institutions, processes and representatives that give structure to our town, states, and country.”<sup>10</sup>

8. Among other things, the unreconciled activists charged that clearing trees for soccer fields would diminish the earth’s capacity to cleanse the air and that use of synthetic building materials for faculty housing would harm chemically sensitive residents of Concord.

9. Quoted in Bryan Davis, “NRC Votes to Sign Middlesex Pact,” *Concord Journal*, April 24, 1997, p. 16.

10. Letter of Thomas Doe, September 26, 1995, contained in the files of the Natural Resources Commission.



I acknowledge that my sympathies lie with the second camp. In recent years many academics have exalted civic engagement, seeing in it the solution to social problems and conflicts that have resisted the application of expertise and money. But civic engagement can be expected to have such salutary consequences only if those engaged are representative of the interests and values of the larger community. That is true by definition if *everyone* is engaged, but when engagement is largely the domain of minority viewpoints, obvious problems of unrepresentativeness arise. When they do, civic engagement has a dark side that is not sufficiently recognized by its proponents. Unfortunately, as a brief survey will suggest, over the course of the previous generation developments in American politics have cumulated to increase the conflict between civic engagement and representative democracy.

### From JFK to WJC

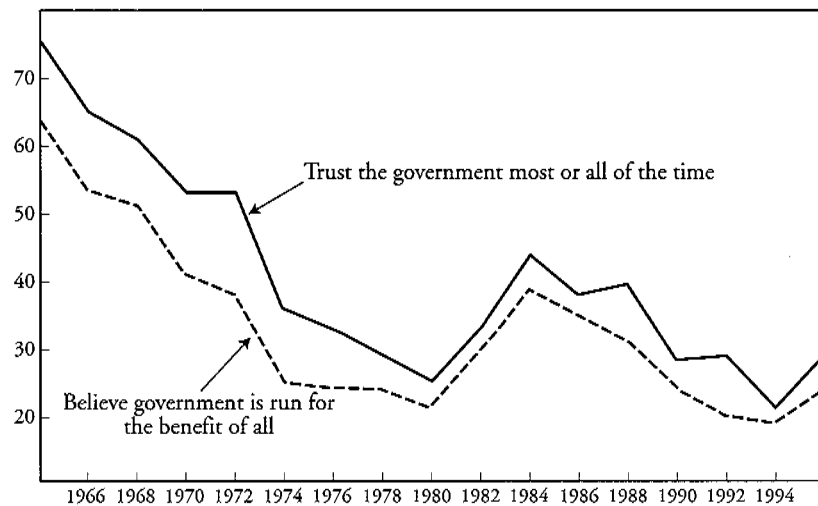
As a starting point, consider the much-discussed decline in trust in government. There is a great deal of evidence on this subject, but the best time series are those contained in the American National Election Studies (see Figure 11-2). From the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s people's trust in government declined dramatically: a generation ago two-thirds to three-quarters of the population expressed high levels of trust; under one-third did so in 1996.

Three observations. First, those who write on this subject generally assume—at least implicitly—that the decline in trust is bad. I am agnostic on this point. Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and other American luminaries probably would have been more disturbed by the 1960s figures than the 1990s ones. Second, there also is a tendency for analysts to assume that the early figures are representative and the later ones aberrant. That seems a dubious assumption. Anyone reasonably familiar with American history should have no trouble thinking of eras when popular attitudes probably looked more like they do today than they did in the 1960s. Rather than 1994 Americans being a bunch of angry cynics, 1964 Americans may have been a bunch of deluded optimists. Third, many observers have pointed out that declines in trust are not limited to government or to the United States.<sup>11</sup> As a social scientist committed to generalization I recognize the

11. See, for example, Lipset and Schneider (1983).

Figure 11-2. *Americans' Level of Trust in the National Government, 1964-96<sup>a</sup>*

Percent



Source: American National Election Studies, website: [www.umich.edu/~nes](http://www.umich.edu/~nes).

a. The original questions read: (a) "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?" and (b) "Would you say that the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?" Responses to the first question in this figure include those who answered "just about always" or "most of the time." Data on 1986 responses to the second question do not exist.

validity of that observation, but it has not affected the analyses and theorizing of most students of the subject, so I claim a similar privilege, at least for now.<sup>12</sup>

Why has trust declined? There are a number of possible explanations. One is the economy. Inflation soared in the late 1960s, and the great postwar expansion came to an end in the early 1970s. Trust headed south during this period, recovering somewhat during the prosperity surrounding Ronald Reagan's reelection and again during the Clinton prosperity of the 1990s. Analyses that focus specifically on economic correlates of the trust series conclude that economic conditions matter but fall considerably short of a complete explanation.<sup>13</sup>

12. The argument to follow may well have relevance to other institutions and countries, but I am not prepared to attempt such generalizations at this time.

13. For a recent survey of the evidence see Lawrence (1997).

A second explanation might be called the Smith-Barney explanation (from their slogan, “we make money the old-fashioned way—we earn it!”): government is distrusted because it has *earned* the citizenry’s distrust. Vietnam and civil disorders, Watergate, stagflation and the Ayatollah, \$200 billion deficits and Iran-contra, Whitewater, Lewinsky—the list is long and implicates both parties. Political scientists have argued about whether the trust items reflect evaluations of the regime, or only particular office-holders, with at least some evidence for the latter.<sup>14</sup> Surely government incompetence and malfeasance has something to do with the decline in trust, but, unfortunately, how much is impossible to say, given that we cannot measure such variables in any temporally comparable way.

Some observers think a third explanation is relevant either by itself or as a supplement to the first two. By objective standards American politics is no worse today than in earlier eras, but people may perceive it as worse because of increasingly cynical media that are relentlessly negative in their coverage of politics. Setting aside the first century and a half of American history, that claim seems to be true for the previous two generations or so.<sup>15</sup> And it is at least suggestive that surveys regularly show people to be far more positive about their local schools, local environment, local race relations, and so forth than about their national counterparts, where their impressions must be based heavily on unrepresentative reports in the mass media.<sup>16</sup>

Quite likely each of the preceding explanations contributes to the decline in trust in government. But I propose still another hypothesis that is not inconsistent with the preceding ones: the rise of participatory democracy has contributed to the decline in trust. There are two components to this hypothesis—that participatory democracy has advanced, and that this advance has turned Americans off. The first claim is easy to document; the second requires a bit more explanation.

### *The Rise of Participatory Democracy*

No one would claim that the United States today has anything approaching the kind of politics advocated by prominent participatory

14. Citrin (1974).

15. Sabato (1991).

16. See the data reported in “My Town, The Nation,” *Public Perspective* (July/August 1992): pp. 94–96.

democratic theorists, but I do claim that changes in the past half-century have cumulated to strip away much of the insulation from political and institutional processes.<sup>17</sup> The political system today is far more exposed to popular pressures than was the case at midcentury.<sup>18</sup> Consider a partial listing of the changes.

In the electoral arena, John Kennedy entered a few primaries in 1960 to demonstrate to party professionals who controlled the delegates that a Catholic could win in Protestant states. Four years later Barry Goldwater's "purist" or "amateur" supporters rolled over the Republican establishment in the caucuses and primaries, and George McGovern's followers did the same on the Democratic side in 1972.<sup>19</sup> While the parties declined, the advantage of incumbency in congressional elections surged. The literature began to use the terms "candidate-centered" politics and "entrepreneurial" politics to describe the new reality of candidates communicating directly with constituencies rather than relying on the traditional party organizations and encompassing interest groups.

On the institutional side Congress made its proceedings—both committee and floor—more public in the early 1970s. Judicial processes were opened up by expanded rules of standing promulgated from within, as well as by legislation giving citizens greater access to the courts.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, bureaucratic processes were opened up, both by new legislation mandating expanded public notice and participation and by the aforementioned actions of the courts. At the local level, "maximum feasible participation" was the watchword of the 1960s, and ensuing decades saw the proliferation of local government bodies such as planning boards, resource boards, and so forth—many of them filled by volunteers.<sup>21</sup> Concord's NRC is one of thousands of similar bodies created since the 1960s.

In political science jargon, these are changes on the supply side of the political system—office-holders and institutions that supply public policies are far more exposed to popular pressure today than a generation ago.

17. Well-known works in the participatory democratic tradition include Barber (1984) and Pateman (1970).

18. This is the organizing theme of a textbook, *The New American Democracy* (1998) that I have written with Paul Peterson. The book provides a comprehensive survey of the changes.

19. James Q. Wilson distinguished "amateurs" from "professionals" in his 1962 work *The Amateur Democrat*. The term "purist" seems to have come into common use in the mid-1960s, especially in connection with the Goldwater campaign.

20. For a detailed discussion see Stewart (1975).

21. Burns (1991) documents these local government trends.

But there were also important changes on the demand side of the system. As various observers have documented, the 1960s and 1970s saw an “advocacy explosion.”<sup>22</sup> The number of organized interests exploded in those decades. No doubt there was some interaction between the formation of interests and the supply-side changes: the easier it was to participate in electoral and institutional processes, the more incentive there was to do so, but political scientists have not yet worked out the dynamic. At any rate, relative to a generation ago, a strikingly more open political process now faces a strikingly larger number of interest groups.

Organized interests are not the only actor on the demand side, of course. Even the potential influence of the ordinary unorganized citizen increased. Opinion polls and attention to them burgeoned in the 1970s (see Figure 11-3), giving politicians more accurate and up-to-date information about public opinion than they had ever had before. Instant reaction to political events and decisions has become commonplace.

Other technological innovations closed the distance between the demand and supply sides. Individual politicians developed direct-mail appeals for funds and support and took advantage of other communications advances to get their messages out. But groups and individuals were able to use the same innovations to press their demands and get their messages in. Today aroused constituents can communicate their views to politicians almost instantaneously. In 1994, for example, an aroused home-schooling movement stampeded the House of Representatives with half a million communications in a matter of days, overwhelming Capitol Hill switchboards and fax machines.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, the political system of John Kennedy’s America was far different from that of Bill Clinton’s America. The “elitist” democracy of the 1960s Yale pluralists has been supplanted by the “populist” democracy of today, as Robert Dahl himself recently has argued.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary Americans have far more opportunities to influence their government directly than did Americans of midcentury. And therein lies the irony: contemporary Americans are far more distrustful of, cynical about, and hostile toward that government. Americans trusted their government more when party bosses chose nominees, when Southern committee barons dominated Congress, when legislatures and boards conducted their business

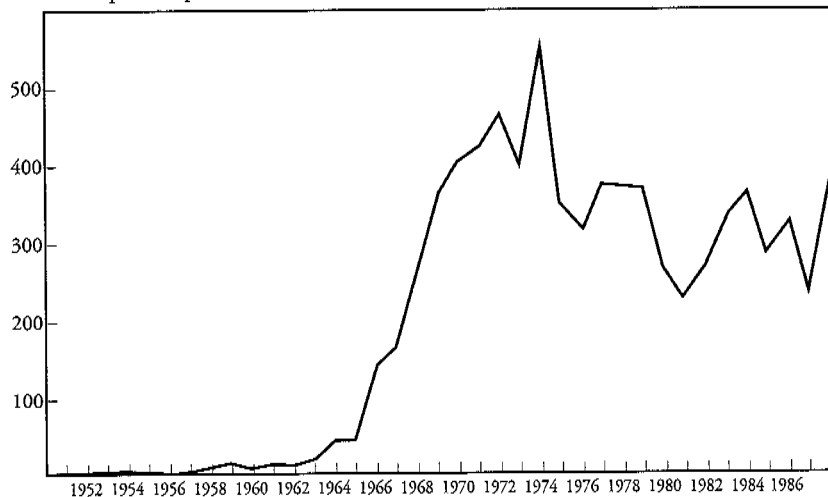
22. Important studies include Schlozman and Tierney (1986) and Walker (1991).

23. This episode is described in Fiorina and Peterson (1998, pp. 199–200).

24. Dahl decries this development in *The New American Political (Dis)Order* (1994).

Figure 11-3. *Media Coverage of Poll Results, 1950–88*<sup>a</sup>

Number of public opinion stories



Source: John Brehm, *The Phantom Respondents* (University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 4.

a. Figure shows the number of stories cited under “public opinion” in *The New York Times* index. According to John Brehm, the cited public opinion stories “by and large report poll results, and only rarely reflections on public opinion in the broader sense.”

behind closed doors, when access to the courts and bureaucracy was restricted, and when big business, big labor, and big agriculture dominated the interest group universe.

### *Why Participatory Democracy Makes Americans Unhappy*

“Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right”

from Stealer’s Wheel, “Stuck in the Middle with You”

There are several reasons why Americans who have more opportunities than ever before to influence the actions of their government trust their government less than before. One explanation—popular two decades ago—is “overload.” Noting the increase in interest group activity and popular participation described above, some democratic theorists expressed their concern that with encompassing organizations such as parties and unions declining, interest-aggregating structures were being over-

whelmed by the rise in interest articulation.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, if the scope of government has expanded, so that expectations are higher than in the past, the problem would be compounded.<sup>26</sup> Although the relevant evidence is mostly circumstantial, this explanation has a good deal of plausibility.<sup>27</sup>

More recently, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse have resurrected Bismarck's caution against watching the production of sausages or laws.<sup>28</sup> Considering the low standing of Congress in relation to the presidency and the Supreme Court, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse argue that Congress is despised precisely because of its openness. Congress allows citizens to see democracy in all its messiness—interest groups lobbying, parties posturing, members dealing and compromising. Generalizing this argument, the more open American politics becomes, the less citizens can maintain the fiction of public-spirited officials working cooperatively to solve social problems and defuse social conflicts. Again, this explanation certainly is plausible.

While seeing merit in both of the preceding hypotheses, I propose a third that is not inconsistent with either: the transition to a more participatory democracy increasingly has put politics into the hands of unrepresentative participators—extreme voices in the larger political debate. Consider another brief listing of research findings.

Back in the 1960s political science students studied Anthony Downs's exposition of the centrist logic of two-party competition.<sup>29</sup> A generation later intellectual inheritors of the Downsian tradition were working to develop models in which the candidates did *not* converge to the center.<sup>30</sup> A changed reality caused this shift in the modeling agenda.<sup>31</sup> During the 1980s pundits and scholars alike remarked on the (electorally) unhealthy influence of "cause groups" in the Democratic primaries who exerted a "left shift" on popular perceptions of Democratic candidates.<sup>32</sup> With a "new Democrat" in titular control of his party for most of the 1990s, the problem has become more serious in the Republican Party, where observers

25. Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki (1975) offer a representative statement.

26. As noted by May (1997).

27. I indicated some sympathy for this position in an earlier article: "Through a complex mixture of accident and intention we have constructed for ourselves a system that articulates interests superbly but aggregates them poorly"; Fiorina (1980, p. 44).

28. See Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (1995).

29. Downs (1957, chap. 8).

30. For examples, see Alesina and Rosenthal (1995, chap. 2).

31. For recent empirical work on the divergent nature of candidate competition see Ansolabehere and Snyder (1988), and King (1988).

32. Brady and Sniderman (1984). Regrettably, this fascinating study never has been published.

judge that the religious right controls two-thirds of the state party organizations.

Party activism today is ideologically motivated to a much greater extent than in the past. The demise of the spoils system, public sector unionization, conflict-of-interest laws, changes in our political culture, and other factors have cumulated to diminish the material rewards for party activism and the associated incentive to compromise abstract principles in order to maintain material benefits. Today's activists are more ideologically motivated, and whatever the sample studied—state convention delegates, national convention delegates, financial contributors, campaign activists (see Figure 11-4), or candidates themselves—those so motivated come disproportionately from the extremes of the opinion distribution.<sup>33</sup>

The situation is similar with interest groups. At one time groups were viewed as moderating influences in politics.<sup>34</sup> Because people had multiple memberships they were subject to cross-pressures that led them to moderate their stands. On some important issues groups were so heterogeneous internally that they could not take clear positions or exert political influence.<sup>35</sup> Contrast those stylized facts with the contemporary ones. The economic groups formed in the previous generation are more focused and specialized than the older groups people joined before that. They represent single industries, not large sectors. Moreover, there has been a proliferation of "single-issue groups." In the 1960s the NRA was everyone's example of the latter; today, people have their choice of hundreds, many involving matters far more esoteric than guns. Scholars today are more likely to view interest groups as a divisive force in politics, not a moderating one.

If the polarization of political activists were purely a partisan phenomenon or one limited to the national political level, devotees of civic engagement might dismiss it as an exception to the axiom that the more civic engagement the better. Voting in a primary or attending a pro-choice rally may not be the best examples of what they mean by civic engagement. But anyone who has followed a variety of nonpartisan community conflicts in recent years—sex education, land use, leash laws, the organization of

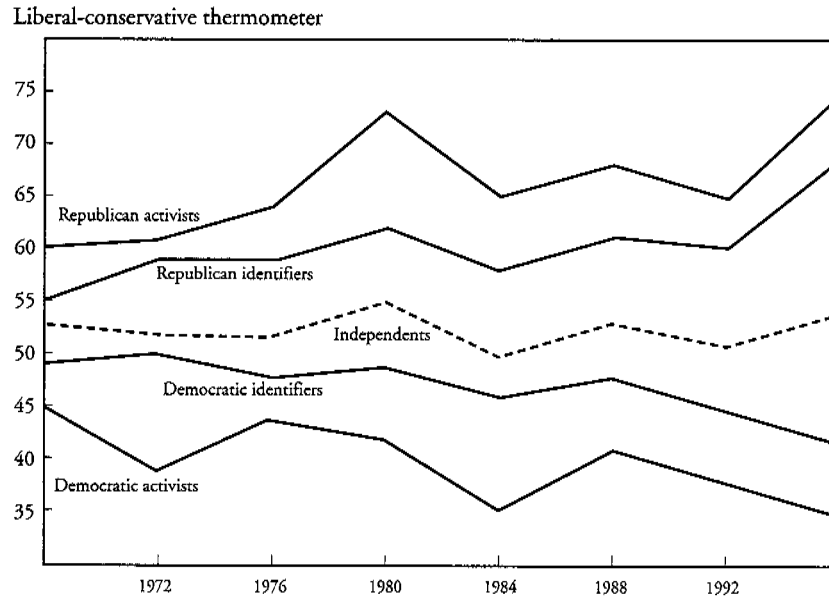
33. On state delegates see McCann (1996). On national delegates see Miller and Jennings (1986). On contributors see Brown, Powell, and Wilcox (1995). On candidates see Erikson (1990).

34. The locus classicus is Truman (1958).

35. As discussed by Bauer, Poole, and Dexter (1968) in the context of trade legislation.



Figure 11-4. *Ideology Thermometer Scores of Party Identifiers and Activists, 1968–96<sup>a</sup>*



Source: American National Election Studies, website: [www.umich.edu/~nes](http://www.umich.edu/~nes).

a. Activists are defined as respondents who engaged in three or more campaign activities. Partisan identifiers do not include leaners. The liberal-conservative thermometer score measures the respondents' relative thermometer ratings of "liberals" and "conservatives."

children's activities, and so forth—can testify to the generality of the phenomenon. One group of activists may propose something outside the mainstream of community sentiment only to be countered by another group's proposal equally far off in another direction. Or opponents may simply exercise their "exit" option and withdraw from the discussion. In most such conflicts my strong suspicion is that a handful of people picked randomly off the street could have offered proposals that would have beaten the formal contenders in majority votes of the community.

What is going on here? The answer is clear enough. Ordinary people are by and large moderate in their views—relatively unconcerned and uninformed about politics most of the time and comfortable with the language of compromise, trade-offs, and exceptions to the rule. Meanwhile, political and governmental processes are polarized, the participants self-righteous and intolerant, their rhetoric emotional and excessive. The

moderate center is not well represented in contemporary national politics—and often not in state and local politics either.<sup>36</sup>

The abortion issue provides a noteworthy illustration. Survey after survey finds that the majority of Americans are “pro-choice butts.” They endorse the principle of choice and oppose the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, but blithely approve of numerous restrictions such as parental consent, mandatory counseling, viability testing, and denial of public funding. As Colin Powell, among others, has discovered, however, the debate is dominated by people who condemn as pro-choice someone who would abort a fetus without a brain, and people who denounce as pro-life someone who would outlaw the abortion of a healthy eight-month fetus. Irony of ironies, it took an unelected Supreme Court to impose the kind of broadly acceptable compromise that elective politics had been unable to achieve for two decades, although it had long been evident in the public opinion polls.<sup>37</sup>

In sum, another reason people are frustrated with government is that all too often they see the participants in government locked in battle over unattractive and unrealistic alternatives. The result is unnecessary conflict and animosity, delay and gridlock, and a public life that seems to be dominated by “quarrelsome blowhards,” to borrow Ehrenhalt’s apt terminology.<sup>38</sup>

Other aspects of political activism exacerbate the problem. Verba and Nie, and Verba, Schlozman, and Brady report that participants care about somewhat different issues than nonparticipants.<sup>39</sup> Thus, not only do the activists debate extreme alternatives, but they also talk about issues nonactivists care less about. Moreover, purist “true believers” have a style different from that of ordinary people. They place more weight on symbols (dubbed “principles”), reject what appear to be reasonable compromises, draw bright lines where many people see only fuzzy distinctions, and label those who disagree with them as enemies.<sup>40</sup> Changes that empower or even

36. On the polarization of national politics see McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal (1998).

37. For polling data on abortion showing majority support for various restrictions, see Ladd (1990), “The Pro-Choice Label” (1992). Those citations, along with “Abortion” (1995), also show that after the substance of the court decisions was explained, comfortable majorities approved of them, with figures for Democrats, independents, and Republicans not differing significantly. We should recognize, of course (with Justice Ginsberg), that an earlier Court probably helped to polarize the issue by institutionalizing a pro-choice position in *Roe*, rather than allowing normal politics to compromise the issue.

38. Ehrenhalt (1998).

39. Verba and Nie (1972, chap. 15); Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995, chap. 16).

40. As noted by the common man’s philosopher Eric Hoffer (1951) many years ago. For a more contemporary statement see Glendon (1991).

enhance the visibility of these “extreme voices” help to explain “why Americans hate politics”<sup>41</sup> and distrust government.<sup>42</sup>

### Civic Engagement and Social Welfare

Much of the debate on civic engagement implicitly presumes that it is a good: the more of it there is, the better off we are. I have argued that such an assumption is invalid, at least in the political realm. In the old order, when ordinary Americans had less opportunity to engage in politics, they apparently were happier with government and what it did than they are today, when they have more opportunities. The reason, I suggest, is that the composition of those who participate has changed. Those willing to compromise policies in order to control offices, jobs, and other tangible benefits have been replaced by those who are motivated largely by policy and ideological commitments. To compromise these is to remove the very motive for participating in the first place. Moreover, these committed activists have less need to broaden their appeals in order to mobilize a mass following than previously. In today's America the courts, the media, and money can substitute for sheer numbers. Thus, only small minorities of highly motivated citizens take advantage of the new participatory opportunities, minorities who are by and large extreme voices in the context of American politics and who have less reason to moderate their commitments than in the past.

#### *What Is to Be Done—Party Renewal?*

If the reader is willing to entertain the notion that over at least some of its range civic engagement is socially harmful, what is to be done? Many political scientists trace a variety of problems in contemporary politics to the weakening of traditional political parties. At least since the 1930s many in our profession have believed that parties dominated by professionals

41. Dionne (1991) argues that the country is stuck in a political debate that is foreign to the concerns and beliefs of the larger population, but he describes the discrepancy without explaining why the political order is out of step with the larger population. I am suggesting a mechanism that could help explain the gap he decries.

42. In fact, a recent study by King (1997) shows that people who are far from the position of the strong partisans of either party are more mistrustful. Given the data in Figure 11-4 and variants of it that I have constructed, I suspect that the relationship King finds would be even stronger if positions of political activists were considered.

interested primarily in control of office, patronage, and honest graft had a strong incentive to appeal to the center of the body politic. In that way lay the path to victory and attainment of the associated material goals. Even with a largely inactive citizenry, competitive parties would achieve socially satisfactory conditions—at least relative to conceivable alternatives. When party competition failed, social suffering was often the result.<sup>43</sup> Many in our profession continue to take a positive view of parties, and calls for party renewal periodically resound.

But today's parties are part of the problem, not the solution. Primary elections, civil service coverage, unionization of government workers, conflict-of-interest laws, investigative journalism, and other developments have combined to diminish the material incentives for party activism. Ideological incentives appear to have filled the void. But only a minority are so motivated, and this minority is unrepresentative: "maximum feasible participation" turns out to be pretty minimal, and "power to the people" means power to minorities of extremists.

*What Is to Be Done—New Modes of Participation?*

If strengthening political parties is not the answer, what is? Perhaps surprisingly, I think the answer may lie in going further down the path of popular participation. To paraphrase John Dewey, the answer to the problems created by increased civic engagement is even more civic engagement. In part, I am led to this position because there is no turning back; any argument to restrict popular participation would be met with incredulity, if not ridicule. One of the more interesting observations of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse is that although voters rarely participate, they value the opportunity to participate in the abstract and would oppose any restrictions on that opportunity.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the only possibility is to go forward and raise various forms of civic engagement to levels where extreme voices are diluted. Studies of voter turnout have concluded that despite its older, whiter, and wealthier character the actual presidential electorate does not differ significantly in partisanship or presidential preference from the potential universal voting electorate.<sup>45</sup> Given that the actual electorate is about half its potential size,

43. This is Key's classic argument in *Southern Politics* (1949).

44. Hibbing and Theiss Morse (1995, p. 19).

45. Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, chap. 6); Teixeira (1992, chap. 3).

these findings suggest that a reasonably representative politics can be achieved with levels of participation somewhere between the 10 and 20 percent levels now measured by most indicators and the 50 percent turnout in presidential elections.

That will not be easy. Consider Concord again, one of the minority of New England towns with a traditional town meeting—as close to direct democracy as occurs in the United States. Although the meeting is no more than a fifteen-minute drive for anyone, average turnout is less than 10 percent of registered voters, with a modern high of 14 percent.<sup>46</sup> It is doubtful that another 30 or 40 percent of the residents could be induced to give up several evenings each year. The problem is that classic forms of participation like this are far too costly for today's citizens. New England town meetings are traditionally scheduled for early spring, after the snows have melted but before the fields are dry enough to plow. For the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century participators, town meeting must have been a welcome diversion after a long lonely winter, especially in an era with no television and little reading material. In contrast, consider the situation of today's two-worker commuter families. Spend several evenings a week listening to your fellow citizens debate issues?<sup>47</sup> That's bonkers. Spend your precious Saturday afternoon at a caucus? Oh, right. Give up dinner out in order to make a contribution? Let them get their money from the PACs.

It is time to abandon the notion of political participation as part of human nature. It is not; it is an unnatural act. The experience of the city-states of antiquity where the civic engagement of the political class was supported by slave labor cannot serve as the model for today's complex mass democracies.<sup>48</sup> Nor can the experience of a nineteenth-century agricultural society where alternative forms of entertainment were unavailable.<sup>49</sup> Contrary to the suggestions of pundits and philosophers, there is

46. Figures reported in Stephens (1995). Mansbridge (1983, pp. 131–32) reports mid-nineteenth-century attendance rates for Concord of about 40 percent, but they soared as high as 70 percent on occasion.

47. Another study concluded that the Concord town meeting was demographically representative, except that the proportion of attendees from households with children under eighteen was only 65 percent of their proportion of registered voters (Bracco and Frasier, 1997). I suspect similar underrepresentation would be found for residents who commute to Boston, for single parents, and for couples who work full time.

48. While Jones discounts the extent to which Athenian democracy was dependent on slavery, he also notes that at times police literally had to rope citizens into the Assembly in order to get a quorum (1957, p. 109). Evidently participation was problematic at times even in ancient Athens.

49. For a discussion of the Lincoln-Douglas debates as entertainment see Holzer (1993).

nothing wrong with those who do not participate; rather, there is something unusual about those who do. All too often they are the people "nobody sent."<sup>50</sup>

Of course, I am overstating the case in order to underline the point, which is that the kinds of demands on time and energy required to participate politically are sufficiently severe that those willing to pay the costs come disproportionately from the ranks of those with intensely held extreme views. Given that people cannot be forced to participate, the alternative is to get the costs down.

Thus, we should give a fair hearing to proposals for newer, lower-cost forms of political participation. In particular, we need to reconsider the notion that people must be physically present, or must invest large blocks of their time. Ross Perot's talk of electronic town halls was met with derision among academics, but the possibilities offered by modern communications deserve investigation, if only because they may be the only practical remedies.

The standard objection to movement in this direction is that making participation easier raises its quantity but lowers its quality. People who do not invest their time and engage in deliberation will be less informed, or indeed will be badly informed, expressing their stereotypes and prejudices in low-cost participatory acts. This objection is less compelling than it might seem.

In the first place, the statistical law of large numbers works against it. Empirically, recent research on public opinion shows that however uninformed and inconsistent individual attitudes may appear to be, in the aggregate public opinion seems to be reasonable and rational.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, despite periodic gay-rights initiatives and other popular attempts to deny rights to minorities, studies of direct democracy find little indication that it produces outcomes any worse than those produced by legislatures.<sup>52</sup>

As the various jury theorems remind us, aggregation is an enormously powerful process.<sup>53</sup> For example, even if we assume that an average U.S. senator has a .75 probability of being right on a particular policy question

50. From the classic anecdote about the Chicago machine's attitude toward self-selectors, as related by Rakove (1979, p. 318).

51. See the important studies of Page and Shapiro (1992) and Stimson (1991).

52. Cronin (1989, p. 229).

53. Condorcet (1776) generally is credited with the basic result. For extensions see Grofman and Owen (1986) and Ladha (1992).

(a generous assumption in the view of this congressional scholar), and that an average citizen's probability of being right is .51 (a conservative assumption in the view of this neopopulist), the probability that a Senate *majority* makes the wrong decision is greater than the probability that a national referendum of 100 million voters does. Both probabilities are quite small, but the point is simply that large numbers can more than compensate for less information.

In the second place, it is not at all clear that ordinary people *are* more badly informed than activists, for ideology often masquerades as information. The activists on various issues may be more informed about those issues, but their information is typically selective, exaggerated, and biased in various ways. Some recent studies have compared the views of various political "elites" with those of equally expert but not politically active control groups. For example, leaders of environmental groups were asked to rate various environmental cancer risks. Their ratings were then compared with those of a sample of cancer researchers. Unsurprisingly, relative to expert but disinterested opinion, the environmental activists significantly overstated the risks of environmentally caused cancer.<sup>54</sup> Such findings are not at all surprising, but they seriously undercut arguments that informed minorities make better—as contrasted with "different"—decisions than uninformed majorities.<sup>55</sup> It is not clear that empowering "informed" extremists and letting them fight it out produces better public policies than a politics in which ordinary uninformed citizens have more influence.

### Conclusion

While the far-ranging debate about civic engagement and social capital is full of disagreements, few have questioned the basic premise that civic

54. For all risk factors, environmental activists considered the cancer risk to be greater than the scientists did: e.g., on a scale of 1 to 10, activists rated dioxin 8.1, scientists rated it 4.7; for DDT, activists 6.7 and scientists 3.8; for nuclear power, activists 4.6 and scientists 2.5. Rothman and Lichter (1996, pp. 234–35).

55. One of the Concord activists I spoke with believed that he had acted in the enlightened interest of the larger community. He bemoaned the impossibility of sitting down with uninformed residents who favored the Middlesex plan and explaining how destruction of a vernal pool would harm the reproduction of salamanders. He had no persuasive answer to the question: "What if they were to reply 'I understand all that, but I'll trade the salamanders for soccer fields.'"

engagement is a good thing, or at least that it does no harm. I do—at least when attention focuses on civic engagement in the political realm. There are plenty of political scientists, politicians, and journalists who believe that American democracy worked better when the only participation expected of citizens was that they vote early and often. Today, when citizens have far more opportunities to determine the choice of candidates and policies, small and unrepresentative slices of the population disproportionately avail themselves of those opportunities. Too often the consequence is “clowns to the left and jokers to the right”—a politics that seems distant from the views of ordinary people. When future research attempts to relate civic engagement to welfare measures, it should bear in mind that the relationship between political engagement and social welfare may well be U-shaped, with societies better off with either “a little” or “a lot” than with “some.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Appendix 11A: Why Are Extremists Disproportionately Represented in Politics?**

Social scientists often puzzle over things that normal people consider to be self-evident. Here is another example: why are people with extreme views disproportionately likely to be represented in politics? I begin with the more general question: why does *anyone* participate?

#### *Why Participate?*

The tradition I represent customarily views actions as instrumentally motivated. Thus, investing time, effort, or money in politics is like any other investment; you do it if the expected benefit exceeds the cost. The more individuals value the benefit—a smoke-free society, for example—the more likely they are to participate. The more costly is participation—transportation to the site of an antismoking demonstration, for example—the less likely they are to participate. Of course, the expected benefit must also incorporate the likelihood that the individual's participation determines whether the benefit occurs. So, the basic calculus of participation takes the following form:

$$(1) \quad E(P) = p(B) - c,$$

56. Verba and Nie (1972, chap. 18).



where  $E(P)$  = the individual's expected utility of participating,  
 $p$  = the probability the individual's action is decisive for the  
outcome,  
 $B$  = the individual's evaluation of the proposed alternative versus  
the status quo, and  
 $c$  = the individual's costs of participating.

The limitation of such an instrumental explanation of participation is well known from the notorious "paradox of not voting."<sup>57</sup> In many settings the probability that an individual's participation makes a difference is objectively so small that an instrumental explanation of participation is incredible. Why should a rational individual vote in a national election, join tens of thousands of other people in a pro-choice or pro-life demonstration, or give \$20 to a million-dollar campaign? In cases like these the marginal impact of an average individual is objectively too small to explain his or her participation.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, a second type of explanation sometimes is brought to bear: actions may have intrinsic value—rather than means to other ends, actions may be ends in themselves. A philistine may pay \$1 million for a painting because he believes it will be worth \$2 million next year, at which time he will sell it, but an art lover may pay \$1 million for a painting for the simple joy of owning it. Naturally enough, economists refer to the latter sort of behavior as "consumption" behavior, as distinct from the former, "investment" behavior. Political scientists find the term "expressive" behavior more descriptive than consumption behavior, since in the political context individuals are often expressing a preference for some political outcome rather than a desire to consume some product.

Of course, one can trivially explain any action by saying that the individual likes doing it. Thus, claims that citizens vote in national elections in order to express their sense of citizen duty may well be true, but that hardly supports an instrumentalist conception of participation.<sup>59</sup> Still, it is not true that adding expressive benefits to the basic calculus of participation necessarily results in degenerate explanations. Such exercises

57. Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974).

58. Any self-respecting rational-choice scholar would reject the argument that people systematically overestimate how much their actions matter. Such an argument is tantamount to destroying the theory in order to save it.

59. Barry (1970, pp. 15–18).

have produced nonobvious propositions consistent with empirical evidence.<sup>60</sup> In the present context consider the consequences of adding an expressive benefits term,  $E$ , to (1):

$$(2) \quad E(P) = p(B) - c + E.$$

Far from being empirically vacuous, (2) gives rise to at least four propositions. Notice that  $p$ , the probability of individual impact, determines the balance between instrumental and expressive motivations (e.g., if  $p = 0$ , any participation *must* be expressively motivated). Thus, if individuals decide whether or not to participate based on (2), the following propositions would hold (*ceteris paribus*):

—Numbers proposition: Mass arenas will be dominated by those participating for expressive reasons, whereas elite arenas will have more instrumental participators. This proposition is simply the generalized paradox of not voting. In a presidential election, for example, the probability that one's vote determines the outcome is so infinitesimal that only the deluded would vote for instrumental reasons. But in a small government board or legislative subcommittee each participant could well have the deciding vote.

—Level proposition: Participation in national arenas will be more expressive than participation in local arenas. The logic underlying this proposition is similar to that underlying the previous one, assuming that local arenas generally have fewer participants. Two dozen dog lovers who pack the monthly meeting of the local recreation board to oppose a leash law may reasonably believe they can change the outcome, but those tens of thousands who travel to Washington to march for some cause must be primarily expressing their preferences.

—Resource proposition: When resources are unequally distributed, those with more of them are more likely to be instrumentally motivated than those with fewer. Money is the obvious example. The senior citizen who sends \$10 in response to a direct-mail appeal warning of the diabolical intentions of Ted Kennedy or Jesse Helms is more likely to be expressing a preference than is the \$200,000 soft-money contributor who expects something more tangible for his or her investment.

—Dynamic proposition: In sequential processes, when the final outcome becomes obvious, only expressive participants will be left in the

60. Fiorina (1976).

arena. To say that the handwriting is on the wall is also to say that further activity no longer has any impact on the outcome; hence, such activity must be expressively motivated. Over time, the ratio of diehards to instrumentalists increases.

These four propositions suggest that incorporating expressive benefits of participation in a rational-choice framework does not result in tautology or even ad hocery. On the contrary, the extremely simple formulation summarized in (2) generates a number of propositions with empirical content.

#### *Why Do Extremists Participate?*

Although it goes part way toward answering our question, the formulation in (2) falls short. Specifically, (2) implies disproportionate extremist participation *only where participation is instrumentally motivated*. That is, the greater the difference (B) between the values one attaches to a proposed alternative and the status quo, the greater the expected value of participating. Thus, people with extreme views about moves away from the status quo have higher expected values.

But what of arenas in which instrumental benefits are not the primary or even a significant motivation for participation? As argued above, in such arenas participators must be motivated by expressive benefits. But if participation has intrinsic value, then disproportionate extremist participation in such arenas logically requires that extremists get more expressive benefits from participation. Why should this be true? Why are there not comparable proportions of wishy-washy moderates who enjoy voting and attending mass demonstrations, who love to work in national campaigns, and who take satisfaction in writing small checks to obscure causes? Why should the "taste" for political participation be distributed so nonrandomly?

The common-sense answer is that extremists "care" more than moderates. But what does that mean, exactly, and can it be measured independently of the behavior it is thought to explain? Extremist is a relative term, commonly referring to someone whose preferences lie distant from the mainstream, which often will include the status quo. So, someone deeply dissatisfied with the status quo will take greater satisfaction in expressing his or her dissatisfaction than someone not comparably dissatisfied. Alternatively, someone upset by some other extremist's proposal to move away from the status quo will take greater satisfaction in

expressing disagreement than someone not so upset. If so, the intrinsic value of an action—its “expressive” value—is directly related to the distance of the actor from the status quo or another contending alternative.

In short, what needs to be added to (2) is an assumption that expressive benefits vary directly with instrumental benefits. Formally,  $E = f(B)$ , where  $f' > 0$ . This is a powerful assumption that is sufficient to produce a relationship between extremism and participation for both instrumental and expressive reasons. I believe the assumption is empirically correct, but within my own tradition I am not aware of any deep theoretical justification for it, although there is a social-psychological literature on the empirical relationship between intensity of preferences and extremism of preferences that may be relevant.<sup>61</sup>

#### *Selection or Polarization?*

When do extremists select into politics, as presumed in the preceding discussion, and when does politics transform ordinarily uninvolved citizens into activist extremists, as the older community-conflict literature suggests was often the case?<sup>62</sup> My observations of contemporary American politics lead me to believe that selection is the dominant process, but I know of no work aimed squarely at the question.

If political processes seem to become more polarized, even when they do not begin that way, there are at least two explanations. One is another selection process, although one of selecting out rather than selecting in. Johnson has proposed a model of “unraveling” in voluntary groups.<sup>63</sup> Assume that the members of a group can be arrayed along some policy dimension. Then a standard median voter model identifies the most preferred position of the median member as the outcome of a majority vote in the group. But any dissatisfied member who considers the median position unsatisfactory has the option of quitting the group. In particular, if moderates find the group median too extreme and resign, then the new median will be even more extreme, and more relative mod-

61. Early discussions can be found in Allport and Hartman (1925) and Cantril (1946). Rational-choice scholars have sought to represent intensity of preferences mathematically (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972, pp. 43–53), but I am not aware of any effort to derive a relationship between extremism and intensity.

62. For a discussion, see Coleman (1957).

63. Johnson (1990).

erates may resign. Thus, groups may polarize by shedding their less extreme members.<sup>64</sup>

An alternative possibility is that people with moderate preferences are transformed into extremists during the process of group conflict, as described in sociological literatures such as those dealing with the fluoridation controversies of the 1950s. Such a process appears to involve preference change, which will require the application of different models.

All in all, the empirical side of the study of participation is somewhat more advanced than the theoretical side, at least in this instance. People with relatively more extreme preferences are more likely to participate, other things being equal, but a full explanation of that claim appears to require some synthesis of ideas from different theoretical traditions.

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64. Of course, if the most extreme members are more likely to resign, then the group would tend to become more moderate. The process can produce either polarization or moderation, depending on which members find the median position of the group intolerable

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